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NOTES ON DELEUZE'S "LETTER TO A SEVERE CRITIC" (2): AGAINST LARUELLE

PHILOFICTION DELEUZE/GUATTARI, NON-LARUELLE, NON-PHILOSOPHY

François Laruelle's explicit critique of Deleuze was published in French in 1995, in the same year as his *THEORIE DES ETRANGERS*, which is the book that Laruelle tells us inaugurates the third phase of his research, "Philosophy III", where he has supposedly abandoned the scientism that vitiates much of his earlier work. (Note: it was published under the title "I, the Philosopher, Am Lying: A Response to Deleuze", in English in *THE NON-PHILOSOPHY PROJECT* in 2012). However, this "response" bears all the signs of philosophical enclosure.

It is noteworthy that *WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY* is not just a work by Deleuze, as Laruelle's "A Reply to Deleuze" would seem to imply. It was written in collaboration with Guattari, a non-philosopher, whose encounter with Deleuze allowed both of them to move outside the codes of standard philosophy, and to "practice immanence" as opposed to merely "saying immanence". Laruelle produces a one-sided "philosophical" reading of the book, ignoring everything that Deleuze said over the preceding fourteen years about his own break with standard philosophy, and comes to the predictable conclusion that Deleuze is still doing philosophy, i.e. "philosophy" in his Laruelle's sense, which has next to nothing to do with Deleuze and Guattari's sense as expounded in the book Laruelle is replying to.

Yet Deleuze had already replied to this critique of talking about an outside of philosophy while remaining firmly ensconced within its confines, in the role of a conformist spectator profiting from the experiences of those experimenting the real. In *LETTER TO A SEVERE CRITIC*, first published in French in 1973, Deleuze discusses his own non-philosophical production of philosophy. He talks about how he lived a depersonalisation of love and not of submission in his encounter with Nietzsche, and how going further he was multiplied and singularised in his encounter with Guattari. The whole text is relevant because it is in the *LETTER* that he replies most clearly to the accusation that he is blocked inside philosophy, recuperating the marginals for his own academic profit without taking any risks himself.

Thus, Deleuze's *LETTER* recounts the transformations produced by his reading of Nietzsche outside of philosophy, and by his encounter with Guattari whom he met in 1969, when he was 44 and Guattari was 39. They published *A THOUSAND PLATEAUS* IN 1981, after *KAFKA* and *RHIZOME*, when Deleuze was 56, Guattari 51. These are not the works of old age and fatigue, but are an

explosion of vitality. Deleuze went on to revolutionise the approach to the cinema with his two cinema books. Their last book written together was *WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?* published in 1991, Deleuze 66 and Guattari 61. It is essential to bear in mind that it is a collaborative work, and both voices together (the philosopher and the non-philosopher) reply to the question "what is it that I have been doing all my life?"

The affect in this book is not that of fatigue, nor does it incarnate a sort of after-time of the zombie-like "survival" of philosophical abstraction. The affect is "sobriety" and the time is ripe for them to "speak concretely", the mood is not one of exhaustion but of "grace". The book is not centered on a reflection on limits, these limits are assigned to the history of philosophy, but on a new creation of concepts outside the limits of standard philosophy (=the history of philosophy).

Deleuze and Guattari have already, when this book is published, analysed for over 20 years the different régimes of signs, and shown how signification is just one régime amongst many. They have shown how the standard philosophical book is based on the codification of fluxes, and have written together several books outside this philosophical codification, where a-signifying particles are connected to the outside. Philosophy is performance and transformation for them, before it is codified into signification.

Like Laruelle, Deleuze remarks that there are two possible readings of his texts and of his life. The **malevolent** reading, based on resentment, that judges him forever locked inside philosophy, and the **benevolent** or "amorous" reading, based on intensity, and machinic function that he is producing in relation to the immanent outside. For Deleuze there is no dualism where philosophy "observes" and "recuperates" while non-philosophy "lives" and "performs", this is precisely the malevolent reading that is rejected in the *LETTER*, and at the beginning of *RHIZOME*, where the experimentation is inassignable. Strangely, Zizek and Laruelle converge on a similar reading of Deleuze's evolution that simply dismisses the twenty year long collaboration between Deleuze and Guattari.

Deleuze explicitly demands that his texts be read not as composing a system of philosophy, but as assemblages of philosophical material to be used in relation to an outside. Whatever one may think of the degree of rupture with "standard" philosophy in *DIFFERENCE AND REPETITION* and *LOGIC OF SENSE*, it is clear that *ANTI-OEDIPUS* (1972) goes much further outside, and comes far closer to the plane of immanence, than Laruelle's *THÉORIE DES ÉTRANGERS* (published over twenty years later), just as *A THOUSAND PLATEAUS* (1980) goes further in the expression of non-standard philosophy than Laruelle's own book *PHILOSOPHIE NON-STANDARD* (2010, i.e. thirty years later).

There is neither standard philosophy nor anti-philosophy in Deleuze's work, but the cry of *ANTI-OEDIPUS* "everything is to be interpreted in terms of intensity" is precisely a call for the disorganization of all systems, for their reduction to transcendental material to be used in non-standard ways, and for the reversion to immanence that Laruelle invokes. Laruelle is a good non-philosopher but he is not the first, nor does he go the closest to immanence.

To sum up this part of the argument, Laruelle and Deleuze both talk about going outside the bounds of traditional philosophy, and both use the term "non-philosophy". However, the two conceptions are quite different, but Laruelle does not help us to get a clear view as he consistently imposes onto the discussion a definition of philosophy that is not pertinent to Deleuze's text and thus caricatures it. Laruelle's diagnostic that Deleuze's text is "still philosophy" is thus tautologous, the predictable result of this Procrustean procedure.

Laruelle's critique of the system of difference, as found in the work of Heidegger, Derrida, Foucault and Deleuze, repeats belatedly Deleuze's own self-criticism (as expressed in the *LETTER TO A SEVERE CRITIC*) of his pre-Guattari phase as being still entangled in the domain of representation. More generally, Laruelle, despite his considerable merits, is systematically wrong when he assigns Deleuze to the realm of philosophical sufficiency ("representation", in Deleuze's terms). Despite his own deep and intense nonphilosophical voyage, Laruelle is incapable of reading Deleuze and Guattari's collaborated works, up to and including *WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?*, in terms of non-standard thought and of their relation with the non-philosophical outside, because he has not measured what their long collaboration brought to both of them.

If we approach the two philosophers in a non-partisan spirit we can see many similarities:

- (1) the emphasis on pure immanence
- (2) the critique of transcendent philosophy, called by Deleuze the "dogmatic image of thought", called by Laruelle "philosophy" (or later, "standard philosophy".
- (3) the break with a philosophy of difference, Deleuze moved from difference to pure multiplicities in 1972 in *ANTI-OEDIPUS* with his encounter with Guattari, Laruelle 14 years later in *PHILOSOPHIES OF DIFFERENCE*
- (4) the edification of a "quantum" thought, effectuated in Deleuze and Guattari's *THOUSAND PLATEAUS* (1980) and 30 years later in Laruelle's *NON-STANDARD PHILOSOPHY*.

In *WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?* Deleuze and Guattari mention Laruelle twice explicitly.

"The non-philosophical is perhaps closer to the heart of philosophy than philosophy itself, and this means that philosophy cannot be content to be understood only philosophically or conceptually, but is addressed essentially to non-philosophers as

well" (41).

Followed by note 5:

"5. François Laruelle is engaged in one of the most interesting undertakings of contemporary philosophy. He invokes a One-All that he qualifies as "non-philosophical" and, oddly, as "scientific," on which the "philosophical decision" takes root. This One-All seems to be close to Spinoza" (220).

"The plane of philosophy is prephilosophical insofar as we consider it in itself independently of the concepts that come to occupy it, but non-philosophy is found where the plane confronts chaos. Philosophy needs a non-philosophy that comprehends it; it needs a non-philosophical comprehension just as art needs non-art and science needs non-science" (218).

Followed by note 16:

"16. François Laruelle proposes a comprehension of non-philosophy as the "real (of) science," beyond the object of knowledge: Philosophie et non-philosophie (Liege: Mardaga, 1989). But we do not see why this real of science is not non-science as well" (234).

Two observations:

1) WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY? was first published in French in 1991, i.e. well within Laruelle's PHILOSOPHY II, which lasted from 1981 to 1995. Deleuze and Guattari pose the question of Laruelle's scientism, that is to say of his continuing imprisonment in the presuppositions of the authority of science that characterise both State philosophy and Royal Science. In PRINCIPLES OF NON-PHILOSOPHY, published in French in 1995, Laruelle seems to accept this criticism as he declares that during Philosophy II he had been still under the sway of the principle of sufficient philosophy in the form of a scientific submission to the "authority" of science.

2) Their second criticism is not so much of the "authority" of science but of the privileged relationship of philosophy with science, where they advocate a similar relationship with art too. In PRINCIPLES OF NON-PHILOSOPHY Laruelle analyses his PHILOSOPHY II phase as being based on two axioms that were supposed to be complementary, but that he later found to be conflicting in their loyalties:

- 1) The One is immanent vision in-One. 2) There is a special affinity between the vision-in-One and the phenomenal experience of "scientific thought" (34)

Axiom 1 is faithful to non-philosophy. Axiom 2, with its "special affinity" between the vision-in-One and science, is faithful ultimately to the ruses of philosophy. It was not until Philosophy V that Laruelle, in his published works (most notably in his magnum opus NON-STANDARD PHILOSOPHY), was liberated from the persistent "special affinity" with science in his actual practice of non-standard philosophy (works on non-photography and non-religion).

Laruelle indicates that anything can be given a reading that reduces and encloses it in philosophy, even his own texts. But he asserts that there is also a non-philosophical or democratic reading of these same texts:

"Do I practice terror? There are obviously two readings of my text. There is a philosophical reading, one in which I do practice terror. And there is a non-philosophical reading, which is obviously my reading" (here).

Insofar as Laruelle gives only a philosophical reading of Deleuze's texts he is practicing terror (as Deleuze does when he talks of Hegel). Democracy would mean not only giving a non-philosophical reading of Deleuze, but acknowledging that he Laruelle is not the first non-philosopher and that his philosophical readings do not capture all. Some may even have gone farther than he has on many points. This is what I think is the case with Deleuze and Guattari's collaborative works.

take from here

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